

Flood Control Lake Many Possibilities

By Steve Welch

Each year the lake that I guide on drops from 599.9 down to 594 in preparation for the spring rains. This creates fishing opportunities that don't exist other times of the year.

The drawdown starts about December 15th and continues for about six weeks. What this does is pull the muskie from downstream right on up to the dam to get the shad that are being pulled through. I tell anglers from the north that I have actually caught 23 muskie in one day and did it from shore they look at me like I am a story teller. The great fish of 10,000 casts. I go on to tell them I have caught three in a row multiple times.

These fish are bunched up and you will see them swim right by you all day long. Once while my wife was setting in a chair beside the river she saw one swim right up to her and get some rest from the current. The fish was staring at her right in the eye. She told me that one was right in front of her and I asked if she saw a bait in it's mouth because my line had moved over towards that direction. No she commented I am looking this fish right in the eye so I set the hook and the fish took off. She says now I see the hook you have it hooked in the tail. After twenty minutes of fighting this fish my wife nets it about a hundred feet from where I was. The fish decided to go close to the shore for another rest and with my long handled net she got it. I still had a hundred feet of line out. My biggest ever at 47-inches and 28 and a half pounds. This is how I got such respect for them, one swipe of their tail and they are swimming twenty miles per hour.

Traditional tackle does not work as well as a plain jig with a long shank in either $\frac{3}{4}$ or 1oz. Then we use either a Kalin's six-inch tube or a shad body about the same length. These best imitate the size of the Gizzard shad in the water.

Now there are tricks to this. First of all you need to remember that before the river came up there are benches up along the dam and now they are flooded and therefore structure. Then there are two giant pipes up at the dam allowing tons of water to come out. They are spread far enough to create slack water between them and this continues down the river to where you are fishing.

The muskie will hit you in these two places I just talked about. You cast at an angle towards the dam to compensate for all the current and you try and put your bait in the slack water out in the middle of the river. If you don't get struck there then you reel in your bait slowly as it goes down stream and you try and bring it by the benches that are now flooded. You might only have six-feet of line out when they strike so be ready.

The rods we use are stout spinning rods with 12lb. mono in case it is below freezing and stout baitcasters with 20lb. braid if it is above freezing. Braid attracts water and will freeze up your eyelets quickly. Then we tie on a 12-inch piece of Tyger leader. You can simply use a blood knot and not have to run a swivel. If you don't use the leader the fish will get it's gill plates into your line and cut it.

Even though I have yet to catch a legal sized 48-inch muskie I have caught several 47 and 46-inch fish. Most run about 40-44 which are pushing 20lbs. which are fun.

The second great thing about the drawdown is that this pulls all the crappie out of the coves and puts them right on main lake drop offs and they are so bunched up it is possible to get over a hundred from just one tree. Now putting a boat in the water is tricky in December and January. You need salt with you for the ramp and always drain out your boat and motor before leaving.

The tackle we use to catch these fish are my 1/4oz. Deep Ledge Jigs and a plastic shad body. Color of both the jig and plastic depends on water color. In the winter the lake most of the time is

very clear. So shad colored baits work well as do my Brush Bugs since crappie switch over to eating bugs in the winter.

The down trees on the south end of the lake that the ends of them are very deep are the best. I routinely fish 20 feet deep or more in the winter. We hover over these trees and fish very slowly very near the bottom. If we get some sun for a couple days the fish will suspend up so be prepared to fish at any depth. I have caught them under a cork just a couple feet under the water near a tree that is in thirty feet or more.

The other great thing about the drawdown is that all the structure you will be fishing in the spring is now out of the water so your GPs will be busy marking structure.

The lake will remain at winter pool until April 1st. Then they bring it up two-feet and after May 1st. they then bring it up the remaining four feet. The north end of the lake is very dangerous during the drawdown but the south end if fine.